

ABSTRACT

The rapid development of North Carolina's coastal and tidewater regions has caused an urgent need to protect significant natural resources in this part of the state. However, before protection of natural resources and natural areas can be accomplished, it is important to have background information about these resources, such as locations of endangered and rare species and delineation and description of critical natural areas. The North Carolina Nature Preserves Act delegates responsibilities to the N.C. Natural Heritage Program for maintaining the statewide inventory of important natural areas and rare species habitats.

Funding from the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study has allowed a reconnaissance inventory to identify, describe, map, prioritize, and make protection recommendations for special natural areas, exceptional wetland ecosystems, and endangered and rare species habitats in 10 counties -- Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Gates, Hertford, Martin, Pasquotank, Perquimans, and Washington -- adjacent to Albemarle Sound. Biologists contracted by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program have consulted other biologists familiar with these counties, in addition to reviewing soil maps, topographic maps, aerial photos, and other sources to determine sites for survey work for sites that appear to contain significant or critical natural resources.

Approximately 300 sites were identified from these various sources during the preliminary screening. After a visitation to over 100 of these sites, a total of 96 have been identified as containing biological or physiographical significance at the national, state, or regional level.

This report is a compilation of critical natural areas, both those already under protection and those lacking protection, in addition to a discussion of endangered and rare species, wetland ecosystems and other natural communities, and the geomorphology of the 10-county region. Data from the project will be recorded in the Natural Heritage Program's central inventory management system, which is used by many other agencies for environmental impact assessment, land use planning, resource management decisions, and conservation planning. It is hoped that this report will lead to increased protection of the natural heritage of the Albemarle Sound region.